

VZCZCXRO6667  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #0197/01 0250947  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 250947Z JAN 10  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9670  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000197

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2020  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: A/S SHAPIRO VISIT: BILATERAL TIES AND DOMESTIC  
PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTED

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a January 13-15 visit, Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro met with a wide range of military and civilian government officials to discuss U.S.-Thai relations, Thai views of strategic challenges, and RTG plans to deploy a battalion of peacekeepers to Darfur. Thai officials were optimistic that the efforts to address the domestic political conflict and the southern insurgency were proceeding well, with further progress likely this year. The Thai request for equipment to assist with deploying to Darfur was repeated often. End summary.

12. (C) A/S Shapiro stressed during his meetings USG commitment to and appreciation for the value of the long-standing alliance with Thailand. The USG hoped to build off of the historical relationship by re-invigorating the U.S.-Thai Strategic Dialogue. A/S Shapiro told his Thai interlocutors that Secretary Clinton had enjoyed her visit in July, 2009, and had encouraged him to travel to Thailand in order to explore ways to advance bilateral relations.

13. (C) Comment: A/S Shapiro's visit was an important signal to the Thai of the U.S. awareness of the value of the relationship, and of USG desire to coordinate closely via a Strategic Dialogue. While Thai interlocutors expressed appreciation for the alliance and for the Obama Administration's engagement with Asia, a general recommendation was for the U.S. to focus closely on developing additional ways to make the benefits of the relationship more equal. End comment.

RELATIONSHIP IMPORTANT, BUT ATTENTION NEEDED  
-----

14. (C) The importance of the U.S.-Thai relationship and appreciation for the range of cooperative activities was stressed by all of Assistant Secretary Shapiro's interlocutors. That said, many pointed to areas that they believed needed attention, such as Thai requests for excess defense articles, a desire for greater numbers of training and educational opportunities in the U.S., and better access to U.S. markets. Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban told A/S Shapiro and the Ambassador that the RTG valued its wide range of cooperation with the U.S. in areas such as security, law enforcement, and intelligence. Suthep said close relations with the U.S. were founded in strong personal affinity that Thais felt with the U.S.

15. (C) During a January 14 dinner hosted by the Ambassador at the Residence, Royal Thai Army Commander General Anupong Paojinda expressed to A/S Shapiro appreciation for U.S. assistance and training. That said, Anupong described

frankly a growing sense among the Thai military and other government agencies that the benefits to the relationship accrued more greatly to the U.S. Anupong said that for the most part, the U.S. was able to gain approval from the RTG for any request regarding access, training, or other action in Thailand. Assisting the Thai military through consideration of excess defense article requests would go far in working against the perception that Thailand was giving more than it was receiving in the relationship. A/S Shapiro stated that in recognition of the value of the U.S.-Thai relationship, Washington would do all it could to make sure that Thailand's equipment requests were considered favorably.

During a separate meeting, Minister of Defense Prawit Wongsuwan highlighted to the Ambassador and A/S Shapiro that the U.S. could assist Thailand by supporting the Thai Army's hopes to purchase expand its fleet of Blackhawk helicopters.

¶16. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Panich Vikitsreth told Assistant Secretary Shapiro that the RTG appreciated the Obama Administration's commitment to Asia, as demonstrated by the numerous visits of Secretary Clinton and others to the region. Panich said that Thailand valued the security relationship with the U.S., as highlighted by exercises such as Cobra Gold. The VFM, however, stressed that the Thai military request for U.S. excess defense articles was important and had been raised with U.S. officials by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya. Assistant Secretary Shapiro told the VFM that he understood the Thai request and that the U.S. would give it careful consideration.

BANGKOK 00000197 002 OF 003

¶17. (C) Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) Chief of Defense Forces General Songkitti Jaggabatra told Assistant Secretary Shapiro that U.S.-Thai military relations remained strong, primarily owing to historical relationships developed by senior RTARF staff who had received training or had attended schools in the U.S. Relief efforts after the 2004 tsunami proved how well U.S. and Thai forces work together, and RTARF was focused on developing relations further through work on peacekeeping and through exercises such as Cobra Gold. A/S Shapiro told General Songkitti that it was a U.S. priority to bring Thai officers to the U.S. for education and training.

DOMESTIC POLITICS - THAKSIN FADING?  
-----

¶18. (C) DPM Suthep offered his thoughts on Thailand's domestic political situation for A/S Shapiro and the Ambassador. Much of the tension was based on former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's efforts to bring down the Abhisit government. That said, Suthep predicted that the challenge would ease if the Thai Supreme Court on February 26 ruled against the former Prime Minister and upheld seizing 76 billion baht (approximately \$2.3 billion) from Thaksin. A silent majority of Thais wanted domestic peace and stability, Suthep said, and support for Thaksin was expected to wane over the coming year. In addition, the improving Thai economy would further solidify support for the Abhisit government over the coming year.

¶19. (C) The Ambassador raised with the DPM reports of challenges to Abhisit in managing the coalition, and asked whether the Democrat Party assessed that in 2010 relations with partner political parties would be an issue. Suthep confidently downplayed such challenges, and stated that relations in the coalition were good. The DPM said he was confident that the Constitution could be amended in a manner that would appease the government's partners, including meeting Chart Thai Pattana Party's demand to eliminate multi-representative districts.

¶10. (C) Army Commander Anupong said that he believed that Thaksin had made a mistake last year when he pushed for a revolution during the April protests in Bangkok. The former

Prime Minister had not been served well by his advisors, and was now out of touch with general Thai public sentiment. Anupong said that red-shirt leaders were not loyal as they would ask for funding from Thaksin to finance bringing protesters to Bangkok, but then would pocket much of the money. Anupong echoed Suthep's opinion that Thaksin's challenge to the government would begin to fade over the course of the year, and agreed with the DPM that coalition management would not threaten the Abhisit government.

¶11. (C) Defense Minister Prawit told A/S Shapiro and the Ambassador that the Abhisit administration had focused on stabilizing the political and economic situation during its first year. Prawit characterized the government's efforts as a success, and expressed confidence that Abhisit would continue to be able to solve political problems.

#### PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD

-----

¶12. (C) Ministry of Defense Permanent Secretary Apichart Penkitti told A/S Shapiro that the Thai military's top priorities were addressing the southern insurgency, supporting international peacekeeping deployments, and contributing to regional security, specifically through involvement with the patrols of the Malacca Strait. General Anupong agreed that addressing the underlying causes of the southern insurgency was a top priority and added that resolving the political conflict was important for the Abhisit government.

#### DARFUR DEPLOYMENT AND THAI COMMITMENT TO PEACEKEEPING

-----

¶13. (C) Minister of Defense Prawit, MOD Permanent Secretary Apichart, and VFM Panich all underscored Thai military plans to deploy a battalion of peacekeepers to Darfur by July, but stressed to A/S Shapiro that Thailand hoped for U.S. assistance with a portion of the equipment necessary for the deployment. Chief of Defense Forces General Songkitti told A/S Shapiro that Thailand was committed to UNAMID, but U.S. help with equipment would go far in assisting the deployment.

BANGKOK 00000197 003 OF 003

Songkitti said plans for Darfur would be similar to that of the Thai experience as a force provider for peacekeeping efforts in East Timor, during which Thailand made a multi-year commitment to the UN mission.

¶14. (C) During a separate meeting, RTARF J3 LTG Suraphan Wongthai and RTARF Director of the Peace Operations Center MG Jerdwut Kraprayoon stressed to A/S Shapiro that Thai plans for deploying to UNAMID were well-developed. Considering the environment in Darfur, however, the Thai military assessed that unique equipment would be necessary in order to carry out a successful deployment. These items included collapsible water containers, body armor and recovery vehicles. MG Jerdwut said Thailand had arranged for equipment to be shipped from Thailand to Darfur on April 15, and therefore the requested assistance from the U.S. was urgent.

#### PROGRESS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

-----

¶15. (C) The ongoing insurgency in southern Thailand was universally described as a top priority for the RTG and for the Thai military, and most Thai interlocutors expressed confidence that the Abhisit's policies were a positive step towards addressing the conflict. General Anupong said he was optimistic that the situation would get better. The Thai government had dedicated a large budget for the South, and this money would go far in addressing factors that had led to the insurgency. To complement this effort, the Thai Army would continue its strategy to try to win the hearts and minds of the southern population, the vast majority of whom

did not support the insurgents.

¶16. (C) Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn, Deputy Secretary General for Prime Minister Abhisit and Acting RTG Spokesman, told A/S Shapiro that the Government expected to pass legislation soon that would formally establish as a permanent an agency to coordinate efforts in the South. This agency and a "Southern Cabinet" would work together to effectively addressing the insurgency in the South, Panitan said.

¶17. (C) VFM Panich said that the South was one of Prime Minister Abhisit's top three priorities. Abhisit's recent visit to the South with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib was intended to highlight that the two nations were working together on the difficult issue. Panich also said the South had been mishandled when Thaksin had been PM, but the situation was improving as the Abhisit government was focused on promoting education, dialogue, and understanding in the South.

¶18. (U) Assistant Secretary Shapiro cleared this cable.  
JOHN